

VA EASTERN COLORADO HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

presents

# Suicide Prevention & Recovery in the Face of COVID-19

Tuesday ★ September 22nd ★ 9:30am-3:00pm MT

A VIRTUAL EVENT FOR VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS  
& ALL WHO SUPPORT THEM

#BeThere



# Today's Agenda

**9:30am-10:00am (MT)**

- Welcome & Opening Remarks

**10:00am-11:00am (MT)**

- Connectedness

**11:00am-12:00pm (MT)**

- Peer Support & Resiliency

**12:00pm BREAK (MT)**

- Featuring Music from Veteran Peer Musicians

**1:00pm-2:00pm (MT)**

- Safety Planning and Lethal Means Safety

**2:00pm-3:00pm (MT)**

- Postvention: Loss, Bereavement & Support

***Issues connecting to Zoom?***

Join via audio-only:

**Dial:** +1 346 248 7799

**Meeting ID:** 941 3608 3559



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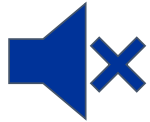
## Disclaimer

This presentation is based on work supported, in part, by the Department of Veterans Affairs, but does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs or the United States Government.



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# Housekeeping Issues



**Please mute your microphones- they will be automatically muted to limit possible distractions.**



**This event will be recorded and LIVE streamed on social media.**



**As a reminder for this public event, please make this a safe and respectful learning environment for all participants!**



**Q&A for participants: Please use the chat for any questions. Chat will be moderated, and questions will be presented to the panel.**



**Support/Resources: Suicide Prevention Case Managers will be available via chat during each session to provide resources and support as needed.**



**Take care of yourself. Mental health recovery and suicide can be challenging topics to discuss. Take regular breaks throughout the day and reach out for support if needed.**



**Presentation slides and event information located on Event Page:**  
<https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19/spsummit/2020summit.asp>



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# Free, Confidential Support 24/7/365



1-800-273-8255 **PRESS 1**

• • • • Confidential chat at **VeteransCrisisLine.net** or text to **838255** • • • •

- Veterans
- Service members
- Family members
- Friends



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# National Anthem







# A Message from VA ECHCS Leadership



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# *More than Ever Before:* **SNAPSHOT OF SUICIDE RISK**



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# Suicide as a National Problem

- Suicide is a national issue, with rising rates of suicide in the general population.
- Suicide rates are higher, and are rising faster, among Veterans than among non-Veteran adults.
- **10<sup>th</sup>** leading cause of death in the U.S. (**2<sup>nd</sup>** cause of death in the world)
- Nearly **one million** people attempt suicide each year; One attempt every **35 seconds**
- More than **45,000** U.S. deaths from suicide occur per year
- Every **12.3 minutes** someone dies by suicide
- An estimated **135 surviving individuals are impacted** for each suicide death.



Women attempt  
suicide **3 times**  
more often than men.



Men die by suicide  
**4 times** more often  
than women.  
(Nearly 80% of all suicides)



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# Facts about Veteran suicide


- **18%** of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults were Veterans
- There were more than **6,000** Veteran suicides each year from 2008 to 2016.
- In 2016, the suicide rate was **1.5 times greater** for Veterans than for non-Veteran adults, after adjusting for age and gender.
- **17** Veterans die by suicide every day
- **25%** of Veteran suicides have a history of previous suicide attempts
- More likely than the general population to use **firearms** as a means for suicide
- **Veteran populations at risk**
  - Younger Veterans
  - Women Veterans
  - Veterans in a period of transition
  - Veterans with exposure to suicide
  - Veterans with access to lethal means




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# 2017 Key Data Points


The rate of suicide was

 **2.2** *times higher among female Veterans*  
compared with non-Veteran adult women.  
*\* after accounting for differences in age*

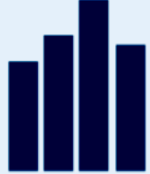
The rate of suicide was

 **1.3** *times higher among male Veterans*  
compared with non-Veteran adult men.  
*\* after accounting for differences in age*

Male Veterans ages

 **18–34**  
experienced the **highest rates** of suicide.

Male Veterans ages

 **55 and older**  
experienced the **highest count** of suicide.

**69%** *of all Veteran suicide deaths resulted from a firearm injury.*

# Veteran Populations At Risk

**10%**

Of service member suicides are former **Guard and Reserve** Members

**20%**

Is the increased risk of death by suicide for **rural** Veterans

**81**

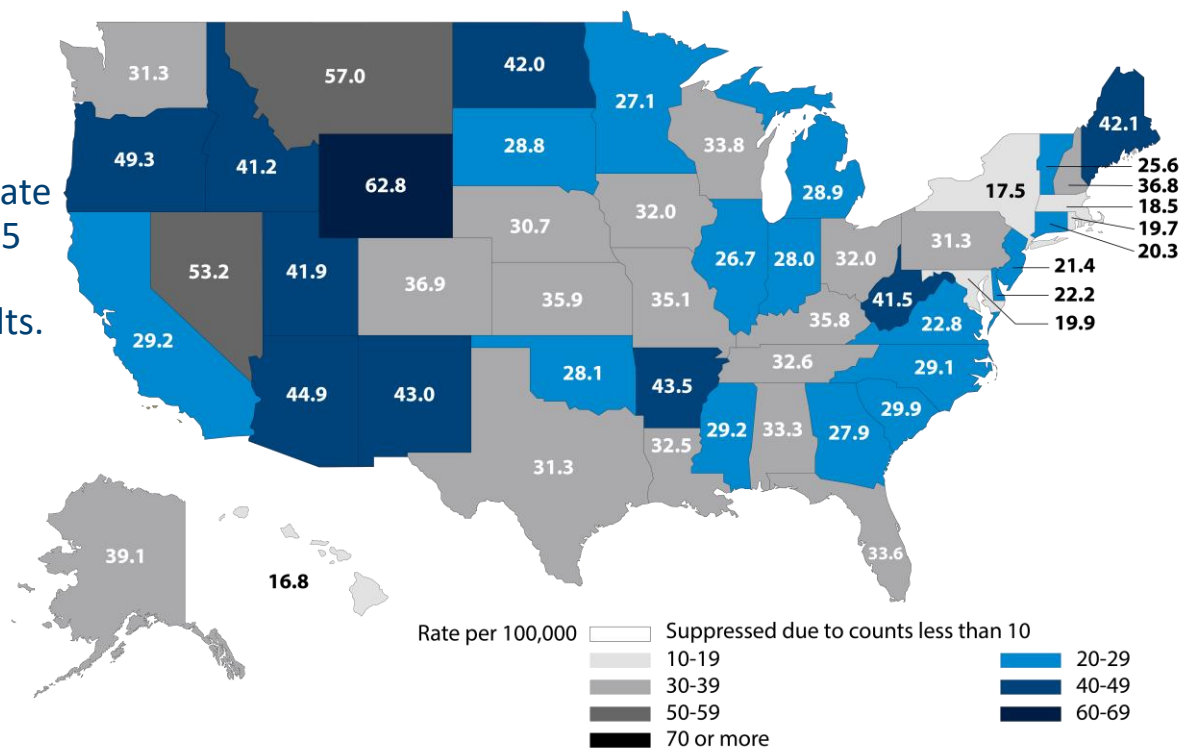
Per 100,000 is the suicide rate among **homeless** Veterans

**4.3%**

Of all suicides in 2014 involved **opioids**

# Veteran Suicide Rates by State (2017)

In 2017, the suicide rate for Veterans was 1.5 times the rate for non-Veteran adults.



# Colorado Counties Veteran Suicide Counts (2004-2018)

\*El Paso (540)

\*Jefferson

\*Arapahoe

\*Denver

\*Larimer

\*Adams

Weld

Boulder

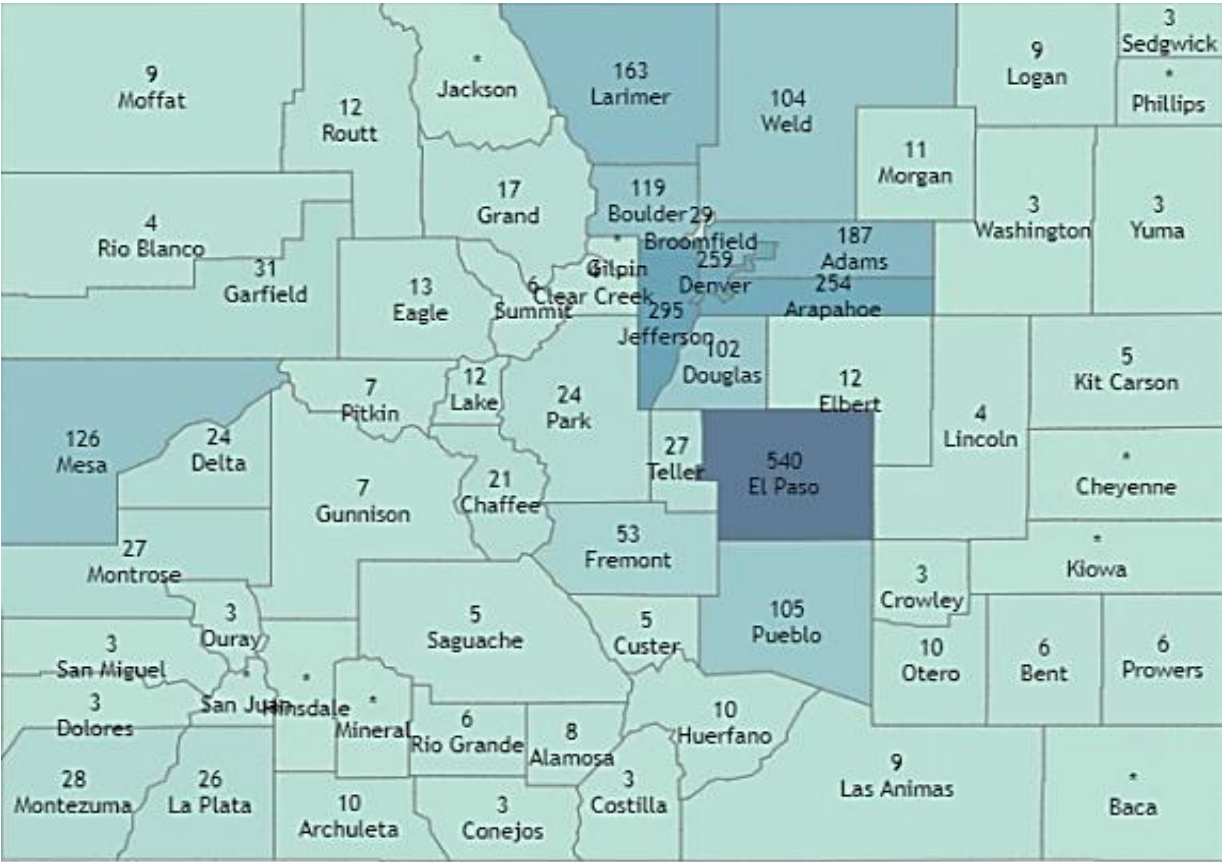
Pueblo

Mesa

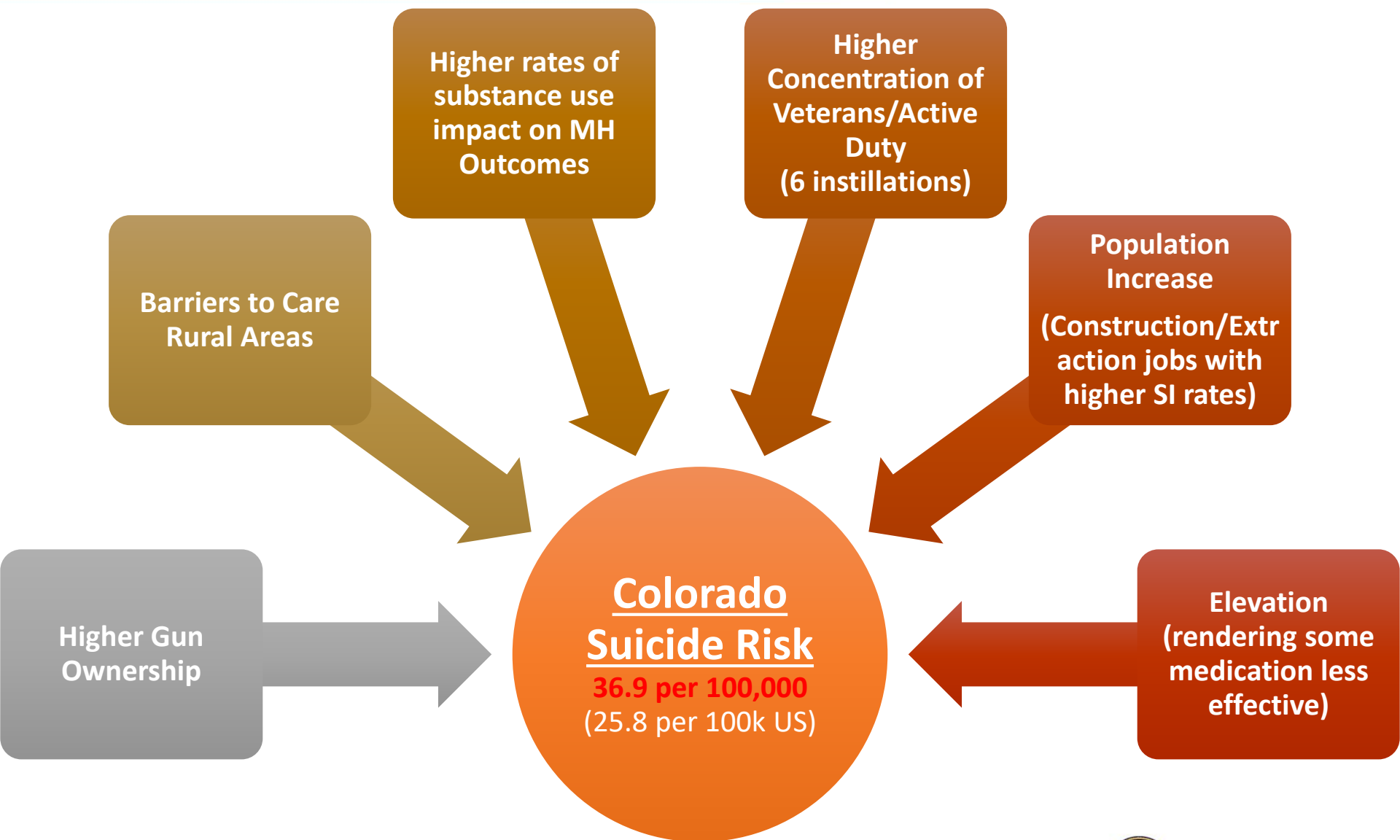
Douglas

**Total 2,788 Veteran suicides**

\*Counties with highest Veteran suicides above 100 deaths







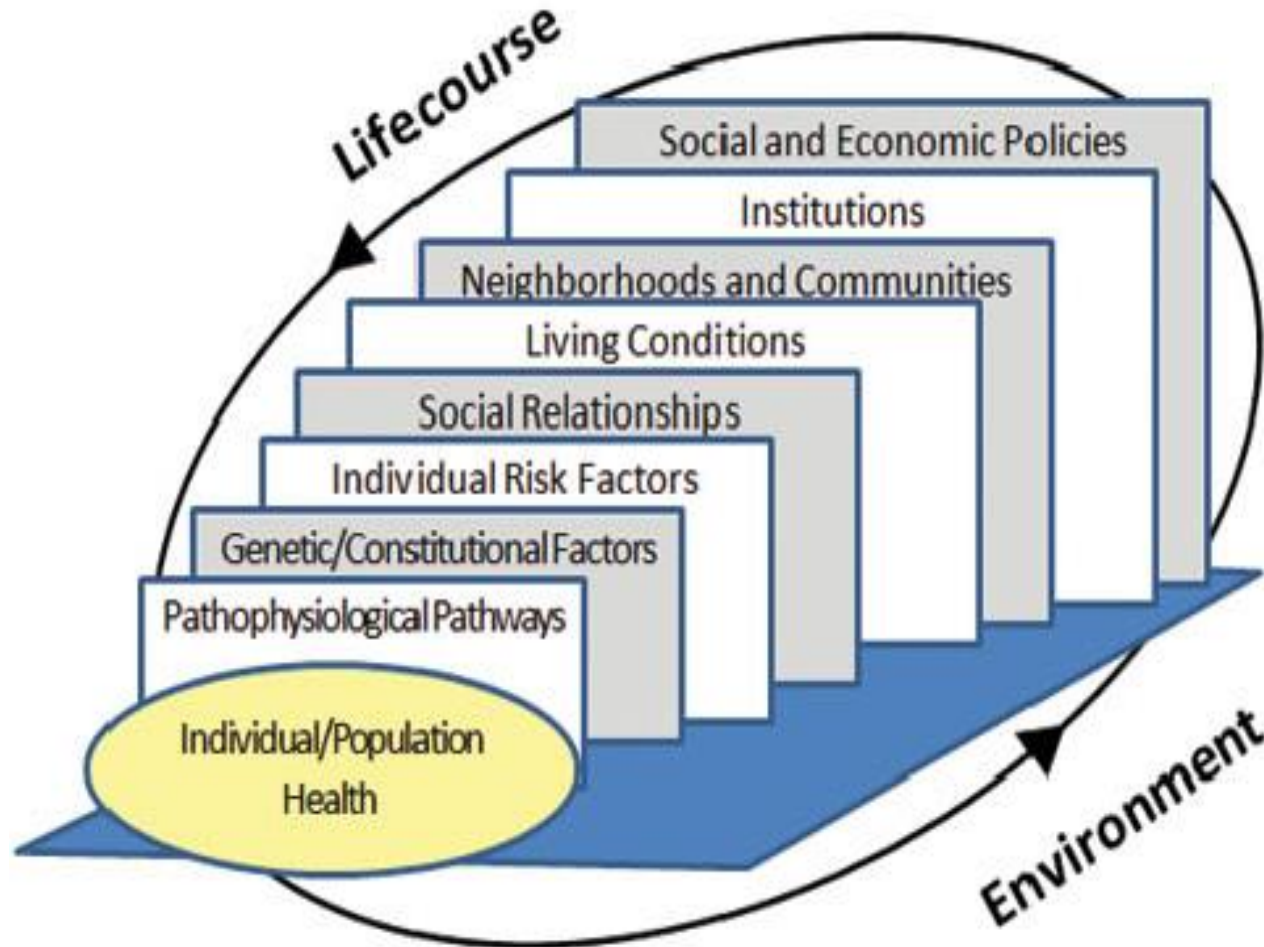
# COVID-19 as additional risk

- Fear of positive test or exposure
- Fear of related stigma
- Increased isolation, social anxiety, or limited supports
- Financial stress, jobless, loss of income
- Veteran unemployment rate increased from 2.3% to 11.7%
- Risk of preexisting conditions and high-risk groups
- Long-term, lingering effects of COVID
- Limitations to bereavement related to COVID deaths and other losses
- Over 1,600 COVID related Veteran deaths
- 91% increase in firearms sales in US since start of pandemic



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# Not one issue, organization, person, intervention will prevent suicide





# SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE...



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# Anchors of Hope



There has been a **declining rate of suicide** among Veterans in recent VHA care with a diagnosis of depression.



Evaluation of VA outpatient mental health programs indicates that after 3 months Veterans who initially reported suicidal ideation were 1.9 times more likely to report **less severe** suicidal ideation than to report the same level. Reductions in suicidal ideation were also documented for Veterans who had received VA acute inpatient mental health services.



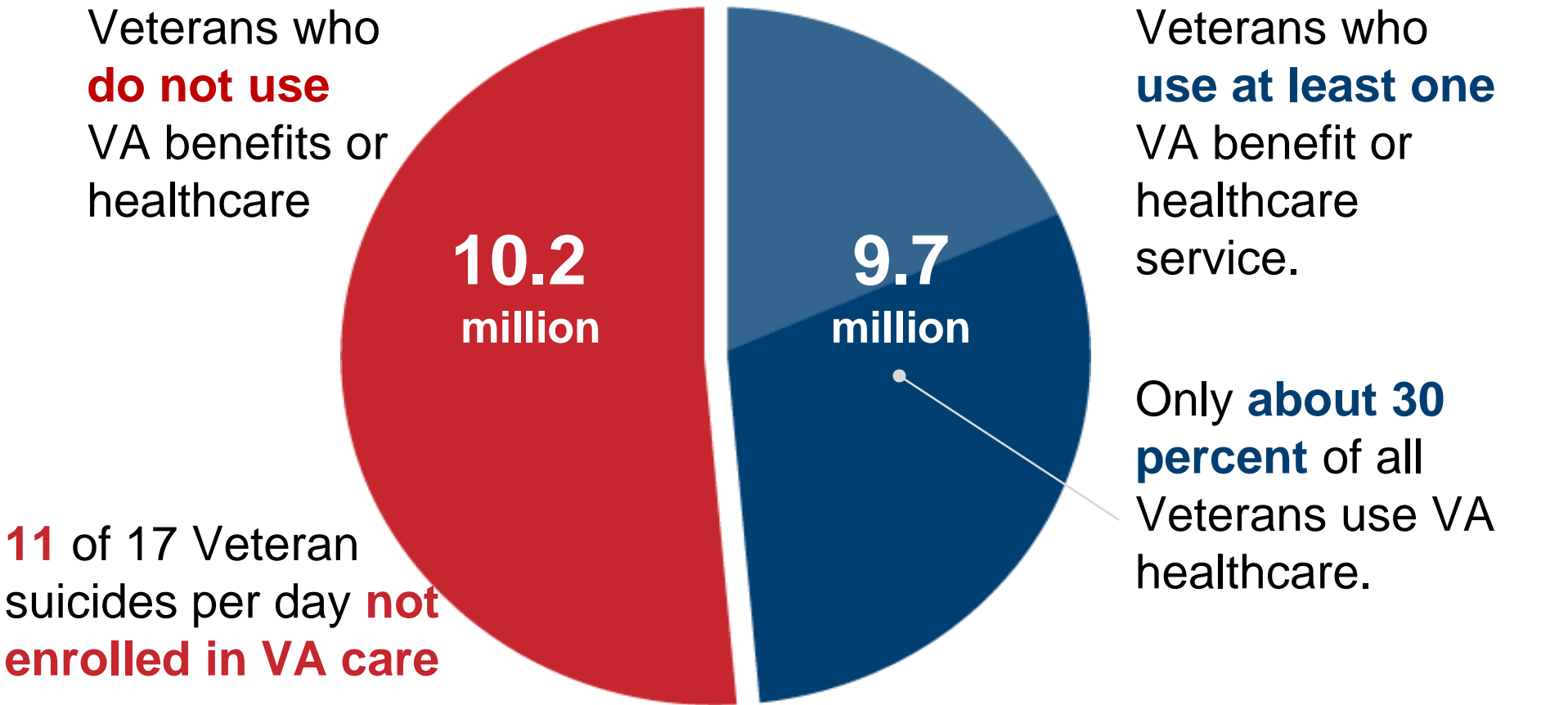
Among women Veterans who were VHA users, there was **no increase** in the suicide rate or the number of suicide deaths from 2016 to 2017.



VA is a **national leader in suicide prevention** with advances in universal suicide risk screening, Veterans Crisis Line performance, primary care mental health integration (PCMHI), and same day mental health services.

**And yet, we need to do more. We cannot do this work without each of you.**

# 50% of Veterans do not use VA benefits/healthcare



*Goal is not to get every Veteran enrolled in VA care, but rather to equip communities to help Veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it the most.*



# Suicide Prevention is Everyone's Business



# Join Us in Action

- Let us come together and apply multiple approaches to prevent suicide.
- Suicide prevention involves meaningful connections, one person at a time.
  - Learn about **suicide and prevention resources**:  
[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/resources.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/resources.asp).
  - Apply the data to guide prevention strategies and initiatives.
  - Promote **S.A.V.E. training**: <https://psycharmor.org/courses/s-a-v-e/>.
  - Post the **Veterans Crisis Line** number (1-800-273-8255, press 1) in your offices and newsletters.
- Share with Veteran employees and community partners that help is always available.
  - In employee meetings and communications, **talk** about:
    - stress management, self-care, risk factors, and mental health.

***#BeThere: We all have a role to play in preventing suicide among Veterans and service members in our communities.***



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# Thank you for joining us today!



**Veteran Suicide Prevention & Recovery  
in the Face of COVID-19**

**VA**



**U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health Administration  
*Eastern Colorado Health Care System*

